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Urbanization and Women's Access to Tertiary Education: Case of 11 Middle East Countries

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the causal relationship between urbanization and women's access to tertiary education in 11 Middle East countries.The study obtained and analyzed data from the world bank 2018 database.The study applied a multiple linear regression for one dependent variable (School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)) and two independent variables (Urban population (% of total population)) & GDP per capita (current US$)) over a period of 45 years.The study assesses a positive impact of both urbanization and GDP per capita on women access to tertiary education in the sample countries, where urbanization impact is even stronger than that of the GDP per capita. In the countries that have a big share of the rural population, women access to tertiary education is still less than what it should be.In areas where female education is low(like in Yemen), there is a need to create awareness about the importance of female higher education. Also, to provide rural communities with decent academic facilities and infrastructures to ease women access to tertiary education. Moreover, to provide women from rural and remote communities with scholarships and female-only safe and cheap dormitories in case they move to study in faraway urban areas. This can promote equal access to tertiary education between rural and urban women, and improve their status and the economic growth in their countries.

Keywords:

Urbanization, Women Tertiary Education, Urban Population, Middle East, GDP Per Capita

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1. Introduction

Despite the worldwide expansion of higher education during the second half of the 20th century, women limited access to tertiary education persist nearly everywhere, not only in the Middle East. Access of women to tertiary education (education above school age, including college, university, and vocational courses) was marginalized since the 1960s until the late 1980s. However, many factors have promoted women access to tertiary education in the last three decades such as economic growth, GDP per capita and globalization. But, urbanization[1] seems tobe one of the strongest factors that have been helping women getting access to tertiary education in the Middle East countries[2]. The shift from rural dominated population to an urban dominated population in these countries has started gradually since the 1960s. At the beginning of the 1980s, the percentage of the urban population in the majority of the Middle East countries[3] has increased to more than 50 percent. Afterward, by the end of 2018, most of the countries in the Middle East have become urban dominated population.Urbanization led to creating new facilities, infrastructures, and academic institutions; more importantly, it created a change of people mentality toward the importance of women education, particularly at the tertiary level.

[1]Urbanization refers to the population shift from rural areas to urban areas, the gradual increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas, and the ways in which each society adapts to this change. In other words, it refers to the shift from an agricultural economy to an economy based on services and globalization.

[2] Only 11 Middle East countries are included in this study due to data unavailability of other countries for the main indicator/s of the study. These countries are Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syrian, Egypt, Qatar, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, and Cyprus. Therefore, the term Middle East countries in the study, later on, refers to them only.

[3]All the sample countries in the study, except Egypt, Syria, and Yemen.

This study aims to assess the effect of shifting the population from rural to urban in the Middle East countries from 1962 to 2006 on women access to tertiary education from 1972 to 2016. The study data is obtained from the world bank 2018[4]database, and it has been analyzed empirically. More specifically, the study carried out a multiple linear regression for one dependent variable (School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)) and two independent variables (Urban population (% of total population) & GDP per capita (current US$) over a period of 45 years. The study assesses a positive impact of both urbanization and GDP per capita on women access to tertiary education in these countries, where urbanization impact is even more significant than that of the GDP per capita. In the countries that have a big share of the rural population, women access to tertiary education is less than what it should be. In areas where female education is low (like in Yemen), there is a need to create awareness about the importance of female higher education. Also, to provide rural communities with decent academic facilities and infrastructures to ease women access to tertiary education. Moreover, to provide women from rural and remote communities with scholarships and female-only safe and cheap dormitories in case they move to study in faraway urban areas. This can promote equal access to tertiary education between rural and urban women, and improve their status and the economic growth in their countries.

This paper is organized as follows: section 2 has a literature review of the urbanization impact on women's access to tertiary education, in turn, their access to the labor market (economic growth). Section 3 overviews the situation, opportunities, and main challenges of women tertiary education in the Middle East. Section 4 presents the data and methodologies. Section 5 discusses the results of the multiple linear regression, and section 6 concludes.

2. Literature Review

"If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation" (James Emmanuel, 1875-1927). In rural communities in the past, always has been believed that woman place is the kitchen or farm, and she does not have to study beyond the secondary level, this is even if she got the chance to finish the secondary level. Also, women's access to the labor market, especially beyond agricultural jobs was scant or unacceptable. These two important factors (lack of access to education and labor market) were the main two barriers of women empowerment, particularly in rural societies. Furthermore, they were the root cause of early marriage, high fertility rate and women dependence on men.

[4]The study downloaded the World Bank 2018 database from the following link: http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/

Middle Eastern immigrants and students who went to Western countries or the developed world have helped out in culture change toward the importance of women education and empowerment. Rural-urban migration has a similar effect, even a stronger one due to the expansion of the labor market that created a need for women to occupy paid positions as workers and professionals (Moghadam, 2003). During the rural dominated population era in the Middle East, men had access to higher education, while women had not due to the values of societies, especially that the majority of Middle East countries are Muslims and were more conservative at that time. Even though men access to education was not sufficient, but it was five times more than that of women in that period.

Urbanization and rural-urban migration started since the 1950s and increased significantly in the 1980s; that caused high population concentration in major urban areas (Moghadam, 2003). This has helped women out to pursue their tertiary education directly and indirectly. New facilities, infrastructures, and academic institutions were built, plus a big change of urban people mentality toward the importance of women tertiary education.Women tertiary education also caused changes in the structure of the family and shaped the rhythm of women's integration in the labor market and their access to economic resources.Educating girls delivers a higher return than other investments in the developing world (The World Bank, 2011). Girls' education became a priority in the Middle East, and the economic returns of their education are even higher in low-income countries(Psacharopoulosand Patrinos, 2018).Women are considered a basic pillar of the development process.Peasant and rural woman fertility behavior is different from those of a professional woman or a wealthy urbanite(Moghadam, 2003).Urbanization and economic development have an influence on women's roles and status.Urbanization itself is a powerful factor of fertility decline (Satterthwaite, 2007; The World Bank, 2009).

Women economic power is the most important determinant of gender equality (Chafetz, 1984).Urbanization is associated with greater women access education and employment opportunities, lower fertility levels, and increased independence(Tacoli–IIED, 2012).This has reduced their likelihood of being vulnerable to violence and abuse and has contributed to the social development in their societies.Women access to tertiary education helped them out to join the labor market and enhance their skills, living conditions, and enrich their human capital accumulation. As per to the augmented neoclassical growth theories, education can increase the value of human capital in the labor force, which increases labor productivity and thus promote economic growth (Mankiw, Romer and Weil, 1992).Urbanization also reflects transformations in national

economies by increasing productivity, through moving from employment in agriculture into industry and service sectors; in turn, imposes positive returns on economic growth(Tacoli–IIED, 2012).

Recently, women access to tertiary education in the majority of Middle East countries is higher than that of men. Urban women in many countries in the Middle East, especially those who are educated and professional, enjoy a degree of freedom compared to their counterparts in the developed world.On the other hand, despite rapidly rising female educational attainment and merging the education gender gap, female participation in the labor market in the MENA region remains low and stagnant, a phenomenon that is so-called the "MENA paradox."(Assaad and Hendy, 2018). This gender labor market gap should be further investigated, especially that overall, women outperform men in attending university education in the Middle East (Davies, 2012).

3. Women Tertiary Education in the Middle East

However, the Middle East countries differ in their historical evolution, social composition, economic structures, and state forms. Overall, women in the Middle East have been subjected to extreme patriarchal systems that often affect their education, particularly at the university level.According to the Middle Eastern culture, males are more encouraged to pursue a university education, as they are more likely to get a job and support the family.While the female, on the other hand, would marry after university, and the money spent on her education would be useless for her family.In a report, women were asked if they could only afford to send one child to a university and they have a son and a daughter who would it be. The majority said they would pay for their sons over their daughters (Cross, 2015). Middle Eastern women are representing the honor of the family. In respect to the customs and traditions in the Middle East, men were able to travel abroad to study, while women could not. Also, rural women could not move from their towns to pursue their tertiary education in big cities.Until now, there are still a few conservative countries or societies for women education and work in the Middle East.

Over the past century, women tertiary education in the Middle East has passed through drastic and dramatic changesand challenges.In 1960, several Arab countries like Kuwait, Qatar, Yemen, and United Arab Emirates had no tertiary education for womenat all (Al-Qazzaz, 2017). It can be concluded that early marriage, poverty, lack of parents awareness about the importance of female education, domestic and agriculture work prevented female generations from accessing tertiary education.Nevertheless, in the Gulf region, many rich women have not a need for education nor employment. In addition, many Islamic societies have been resisting women education and work.However, many things have changed, and the same factors that limited women tertiary education have

become important factors to promote their tertiary education. Poverty and the expansion of the labor market have increased women motivation to obtain the necessary qualifications to join the labor force. Also, women university degree has become an important factor in getting a good marriage in the Middle East countries.

According to the UN, everyone has the right to education, and lack of women's education is toxic not only for women but for the world itself. Investigations have established that illiterate mothers tend to have a larger number of children than educated mothers.Therefore, tertiary education is seen as a tool to delay marriage and reduce fertility and child mortality rates (Al-Qazzaz, 2017). Moreover, it is a powerful weapon for improving women status and their role in social change and economic growth. The more women participate in the labor force, the more girls enroll in tertiary education and vice versa. When women have less access to education, the country they live in becomes in a poorer state (Akkam, 2017).

Overall, the situation of women tertiary education, GDP per capita and urbanization in the Middle East is better than the World average. The average valuesof the three World Bank Database indicators used in the study are greater in the Middle East than the World average, see Table 1 below for more details. Nowadays, women tertiary education in the Middle East became an example of successful and progression change.Current statistics highlight the significant improvement and the remarkable expansion of educational opportunities for Middle Eastern women in the last two decades. The tertiary education gender gap is close to disappearing, even in the majority of Middle East countries, more women are enrolled in tertiary education than men. Only Yemen appears to be the furthest behind of the Middle East countries in women's access to tertiary education. In 2011, only 6 percent of Yemeni women have access to tertiary education compared with 14 percent of men (World Bank Database, 2018). However, the status of women education in the Middle East still has room for improvement. In areas where female education is low, there is a need to create awareness about the importance of higher education of female.Finally, female access to tertiary education could slide again! as their access to the labor market is still low in many Middle Eastern countries.

Table 1. The study indicators averages in the Middle East and the whole World in 2018

Indicator	**World Average**	**Middle East Average**
Urban population average	55.271	73.80
GDP per capita (current US$)	11,296.783	15,937.524

School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross) average	40.162	51.218 (2016)

Source: The World Bank Website (data.worldbank.org/indicator); and the World Bank Database 2018.

4. Data and Methodologies

However, the Middle East countries are heterogeneous in their social composition, economic structures, state forms, and strength of the Islamic culture influence. But, women rights overall, has been subjected to extreme patriarchal systems, particularly in the last century. Investigating the urbanization impact on women tertiary education is much easier by taking the Middle East as a whole block. This study aims to assess the effect of shifting the Middle East population from rural to urban from 1962 to 2006 on women's access to tertiary education from 1972 to 2016. The time frame of 10 years difference following the urbanization process is to take its full influence on the population who moved to the urban areas.

The study data is obtained from the World Bank Database 2018[5]. The study uses multiple linear regression methodology to analyze the data. It is a statistical predictive analysis tool that tells whether one independent variable or more does/do a good job in predicting an outcome (dependent variable), and to what extent these independent variables can predict the outcome. The regression equation with one dependent and two independent variables is defined by the formula $Y = a + b1X1 + b2X2 + e$;where Y is an observed score on the dependent variable, a is the intercept, b is the slope, X is the observed score on the independent variable, and e is an error or residual.

More specifically, the study carried out a multiple linear regression for one dependent variable (School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)) and two independent variables (Urban population (% of total population)) & GDP per capita (current US$) over a period of 45 years.The use of another independent variable (GDP per capita (current US$)) from 1972 to 2016 is to make more controlling on the results, and to compare its significance in predicting the outcome with the significance of the first main independent variable of the study (Urbanpopulation (% of total population)). See Table2 in the appendix to see how the data has been arranged to carry out the regression.

Anyway, more information about the indicators that are used in this study is below:

[5] There were some cases where the indicator/s has no value for a specific year/s (in case of some countries). In this case, the study put zeros in the regression model in the empty cells in order not to be considered in the analysis and results.

- **Urban population (% of total population):**it refers to people living in urban areas as defined by national statistical offices. It is calculated using World Bank population estimates and urban ratios from the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects. Aggregation of the urban and rural population may not add up to the total population because of different country coverage.
- **School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross):**it refers to the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown.
- **GDP per capita (current US$):** it refers to the gross domestic product divided by midyear population. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.

5. UrbanizationImpact on Women’s Access to Tertiary Education

It seems that urbanization is one of the strongest factors that has been increasing women access to tertiary education over time. After applying multiple linear regression for one dependent variable (School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)) and two independent variables (Urban population (% of total population)) & GDP per capita (current US$) over a period of 45 years.The study finds out that both urbanization and GDP per capita have a significantlinear relationship on increasing women access to tertiary education in the Middle East. The p-value for both of the independent variables is less than 0.05.So, the study can reject the null hypothesis, and prove that both of the independent variables (Urban population % & GDP per capita) can affect the outcome (women’s access to tertiary education). Moreover, urbanization has a more significant impact on women’s access to tertiary education than the GDP per capita. See the p-value for both of the independent indicators in Table 3.

The ANOVA test results also confirms the study hypothesis, as the Significance F value is 0.000 (< 0.05).R^2 value in the regression statistics shows that the amount of variation in the dependent variable (women tertiary education) value explained by both independent variables is almost 28 percent. See Table 3 for more details about the statistical results of the multiple regression. Also, there is a strong correlation between the first independent variable (Urban population (% of total population) and the dependent variable (School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross), as well as there is a good correlation between the second independent variable (GDP per capita (current US$) and the dependent variable. See Figures 1 and 2 in the appendix for more details.

For example, Oman and Yemen are located next to each other in the Arabian Gulf area. However, they had a similar situation fifty years ago in terms of many factors like women rights, percentage of urban population and women’s access to tertiary education, but the situation now is different. According to the World Bank Database 2018, women’s access to tertiary education in Oman and Yemen in 1978 was 0.005 percent and 0.001 percent respectively. In 1960, Oman urban population was 14 percent, and Yemen urban population was 9 percent for the same year.Urbanization in Oman was much faster than in Yemen.In 2018, only one-third of the Yemen population is urban, while around 85 percent of Oman population is urban. Recently, women’s access to higher education in Oman is 60 percent in 2016, while this value for Yemen is less than 6.5 percent in the same year (the lowestin the region). That is why women rights in Yemen are lessthan all countries in the region, as well as 65 percent of females in Yemenmarry underage (Al Tamimi, 2014).

Anyway, below are the main findings and remarks of the study:

- Both urbanization and GDP per capita have a significant relationship with increasing women’s access to tertiary education in the Middle East.
- Urbanization has a more significant impact on women’s access to tertiary education than the GDP per capita.
- Recently, women’s access to tertiary education is more than that of men in the majority of Middle East countries.
- Women’s access to tertiary education in Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain is much higher than that of men! Particularly in Qatar.
- Jordan was among the top performers in women’s access to tertiary education during 1990-2008. However, its performance is declining significantly over the last decade compared with the region countries.
- Overall, women’s access to tertiary education in Jordan, Egypt, and Syria is very good in comparison to their GDP among the other states.

Table 3. The multiple regression results including the Regression Statistics, ANOVA and the Intercept.

RegressionStatistics	
Multiple R	0.528913568
R Square	0.279749562
Adjusted R Square	0.276821715
Standard Error	15.44666761
Observations	495

ANOVA					
	df	**SS**	**MS**	**F**	**Significance F**
Regressio	2	45595.353	22797.67691	95.547866	0.000

n		82			
Residual	492	117390.9739	238.5995404		
Total	494	162986.3277			

	Coefficients	**Standard Error**	**t Stat**	**P-value**	**Lower 95%**	**Upper 95%**	**Lower 95.0%**	**Upper 95.0%**
Intercept	-5.56154331	2.101	-2.647655251	0.008	-9.689	-1.43438	-9.689	-1.43438
Urban Value	0.34400165	0.038	9.097916072	0.000	0.270	0.41829	0.270	0.41829
GDP Value	0.00022820	0.000	3.450656895	0.001	0.000	0.00035	0.000	0.00035

6. Conclusion

Women rights have been marginalized in the Middle East countries, especially in the last century. Their access to tertiary education and the labor market were scarce and has been subjected to extreme patriarchal systems. But, urbanization seems to be one of the strongest factors that helped women to access tertiary education in the Middle East countries.Since the 1960s, the shift from a rural dominated population to an urban dominated population in these countries has started gradually.Urbanization caused transformations in national economies from agriculture into industry and service sectors. This expanded the labor market and created a need for women to occupy paid professional positions that require higher education qualifications. This made women tertiary education a powerful weapon for improving their status and role in social change, as well as promoting economic growth. Also, urbanization created a change in people mentality and increased awareness of the importance of women university education.

This study aims to assess the impact of urbanizationin the Middle East countries from 1962 to 2006 on women access to tertiary education from 1972 to 2016. The study uses data from the World Bank Database2018. More specifically, the study applied a multiple linear regression for one dependent variable (School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)) and two independent variables (Urban population (% of total population) & GDP per capita (current US$) over a period of 45 years. The study estimates a positive impact of both urbanization and GDP per capita on women's access to tertiary education in the Middle East countries.

Urbanization impact is even more significant than the GDP per capita on women's access to tertiary education.

However, women tertiary education situation is now better than that of men in the majority of the Middle East countries. But, the study suggests increasing the awareness about the importance of female tertiary education, especially in areas where female education is very low (like in Yemen). Providing rural communities with the required academic facilities and infrastructures to ease women access to tertiary education. Furthermore, to provide women from rural and remote communities with scholarships and female-only safe and cheap dormitories in case they move to study in faraway urban areas. This can promote equal access to tertiary education between rural and urban women, and improve their status and the economic growth in their countries.

Appendix

Table 2A. The study data arrangement before carrying out the regression

Countries	Year of Urban population	Urban population (% of total population)	GDP per capita (current US$)	Year of GDP per capita	School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)	Year of School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)
Jordan	1962	53.215	418.5784695	1972	2.257940054	1972
Turkey	1962	32.598	558.4210145	1972	1.84157002	1972
Saudi Arabia	1962	33.518	1511.685101	1972	0.363249987	1972
Lebanon	1962	45.752	512.321249	1972	10.22142982	1972
Syrian Arab Republic	1962	38.044	449.9439294	1972	3.716429949	1972
Egypt, Arab Rep.	1962	38.624	257.5887293	1972	4.51376009	1972
Qatar	1962	86.101	3910.03786	1972	0	1972
Yemen, Rep.	1962	9.831	0	1972	0	1972
Bahrain	1962	82.355	1197.55116	1972	1.788220048	1972
Oman	1962	18.607	472.5234272	1972	0	1972
Cyprus	1962	36.674	702.5922134	1972	1.496359944	1972
……	……	……	……	……	……	……
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……	……	……	……	……	……	……
Jordan	2006	80.97	4109.574819	2016	37.53578186	2016

Turkey	2006	68.45	10820.63384	2016	96.54705811	2016
Saudi Arabia	2006	81.204	19879.29753	2016	66.69941711	2016
Lebanon	2006	86.762	7634.946544	2016	47.32512868	2016
Syrian Arab Republic	2006	54.146	0	2016	42.72755814	2016
Egypt, Arab Rep.	2006	43.073	3525.020165	2016	34.84634018	2016
Qatar	2006	97.671	57163.06099	2016	47.05810928	2016
Yemen, Rep.	2006	29.49	1139.870568	2016	6.432219641	2016
Bahrain	2006	88.452	22619.11667	2016	62.99214935	2016
Oman	2006	72.967	14721.64733	2016	59.68862152	2016
Cyprus	2006	68.125	24019.13787	2016	71.21566567	2016

The data range is 45 years; it's from 1962 to 2006 for the Urban population (% of total population) indicator and from 1972 to 2016 for the other two indicators.

Figure 1A. The relationship between urbanization and women's access to tertiary education in the Middle East

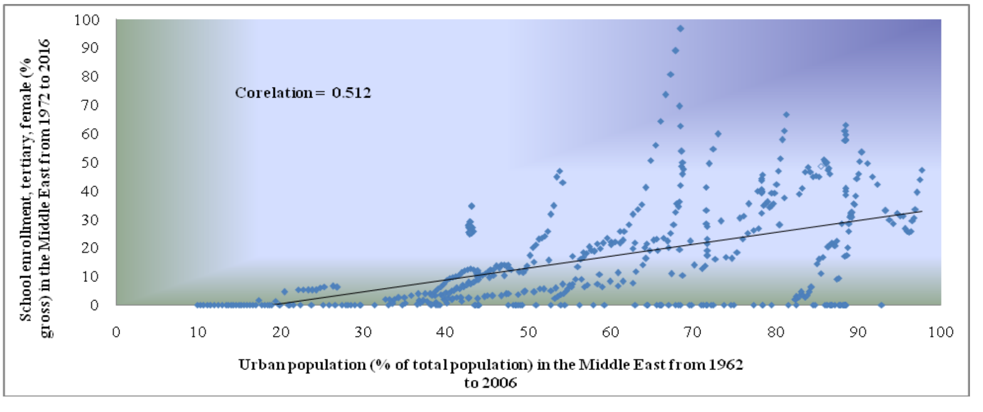
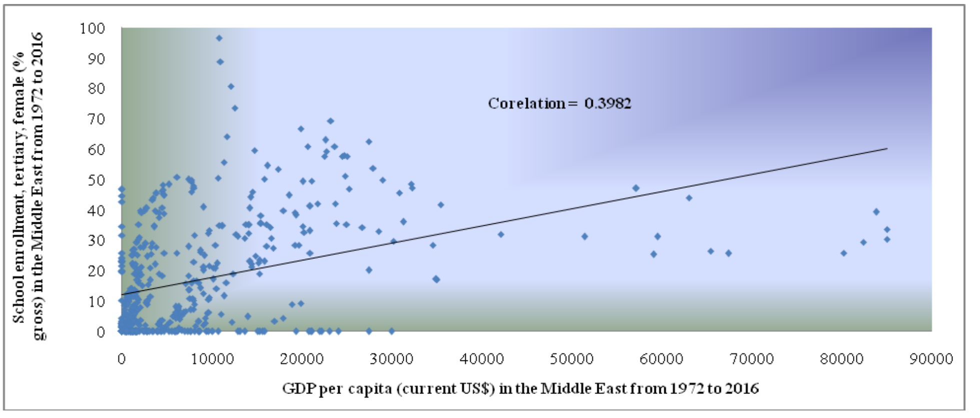


Figure 2A. The relationship between GDP per capita and women's access to tertiary education in the Middle East



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